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May

Year

2013

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: MUSIC

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Title of the extended essay: What is the Influence of African
Rhythm on Early Jazz Music?

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The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

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The research for this project was very thorough. I was initially quite concerned that the essay would be too shallow with little conclusive evidence. However I believe the candidate has proven me quite wrong. The depth of research is impressive and shows a good understanding of developmental research.

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Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Achievement level

Criteria	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	1	2		2	
B introduction	1	2		2	
C investigation	4	4		4	
D knowledge and understanding	4	4		4	
E reasoned argument	3	4		4	
F analysis and evaluation	4	4		4	
G use of subject language	3	4		4	
H conclusion	2	2		2	
I formal presentation	4	4		4	
J abstract	2	2		2	
K holistic judgment	4	4		4	
Total out of 36	32				

What is the Influence of African Rhythm on Early Jazz Music?

Subjects covered: Music

Supervisor-

School Number:

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Session- May 2013

Word Count- 3966

Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to find and analyse the influence of traditional African rhythm ideas upon early jazz music. Multiple fragments of scores of different pieces were used for the analysis. My research produced a conclusion that showed more linkages that I would have ever imagined before doing the research. These conclusions include the use of polyrhythmic and polymetric ideas in jazz, but in a Western style with the use of swing and democratization, different ways of playing an instrument relative to traditional African instruments, and unfortunately a lack of being able to understand all due to the lack of knowledge and comprehension of African rhythms

However, this essay, along with almost all research to the topic available, is limited in its understanding because African music is rarely written down and is even more rarely analysed by Western listeners. Therefore, to provide a score to a traditional African ensemble, one must reproduce what they hear in the ensemble. This reproduction will be written in a Western style, one that is foreign to African music, so it cannot act as a completely accurate score for an African ensemble. One other limit to this essay is that it almost entirely lacks any information about jazz melody. Although the topic of this essay is the influence on African rhythm upon jazz, reference to European harmony in jazz would help the reader differentiate between the two influences and give them a greater understanding.

The scope of this essay analyses a line of a melodic jazz instrument, a traditional African ensemble, an early slave-rowing melody, a ragtime selection showing syncopation, and different sections of an early jazz piece. Clearly, the more material used also produces a more accurate analysis. Few traditional African instruments are examined, primarily the ones used in the analysed selection of the traditional African ensemble score.

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Introduction

The twentieth century was full of transformations; technological, medical, philosophical, and many others. However, one aspect of transformation that is commonly overlooked is the transformation of music, which is arguably one of the largest and most critical changes that took place in the century.

A form of music called jazz was being developed in New Orleans in the early 1900s, often called Dixieland, or New Orleans Jazz. The definition of jazz music is very controversial, but jazz analyst Joachim Berendt defines it as a "form of art music which originated in the United States through the confrontation of blacks with European music."¹ Public opinion of jazz music when it was first developed was very opposing of the music. People would often call jazz music 'primitive' in its contrast to European ideas. This early form of jazz consisted of a front line (Melodic instruments, usually woodwinds and brass instruments), and a rhythm section (a combination of the following instruments: piano, drums, banjo, guitar, stringed bass

¹ Berendt. *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to Fusion and Beyond*, page 371

or contrabass, or tuba). As this early jazz music gained popularity, it quickly spread from New Orleans to New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and to California. Many different types of jazz spawned from this idea, and eventually, jazz had become not only a common type of music all around the country, but also around the world.

The two primary influences on this early jazz music were European harmonies and African rhythm. This essay will explore the evolution of traditional African rhythm into what it became in early jazz music.

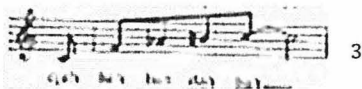
Swing and Democratization

African rhythm can be discussed in much detail because of its complexity in its contribution to jazz music. The best way to describe this African influence of rhythm in jazz is in two contributions that it made, swing, and democratization. The word swing relating to jazz is commonly mistaken to be the definition of the swung note, but the actual definition of swing to a jazz musician is much more complicated. Swing in jazz music is an abstract idea, and Louis Armstrong's comment that if you don't feel it, you can never know what it is, presents a lot of truth towards the term. The actual definition of swing can be seen as the maintaining of a steady pulse and correct note placement, which is the "force in music that maintains the perfect equilibrium between the horizontal and vertical relationships of musical sounds."² Swing can also be thought of as the element of jazz that creates a "visceral response" such as feet tapping or head nodding, which makes people want to dance. Democratization is a rhythmic idea or music in which emphasis is put on naturally weak parts of a beat. These notes are commonly accented, contrasting from classical rhythmic ideas in which the weak parts of a beat would be underplayed.

² Schuller, *Early Jazz*, page 7

Swing and Democratization in Jazz

When relating to swing and democratization, jazz horn players use a technique in which they tongue every note in a phrase, producing much more of a percussive sound than a classical horn player. The effect this technique has is that it causes all notes to have emphasis throughout a phrase, rather than emphasis on just the notes that occur on the strong beats in the phrase. Therefore, when jazz musicians play phrases, rhythm is emphasized, so the rhythmic ideas heard are much more interesting than a piece that is set around beats 2 and 4 (strong beats) in its phrases.



This example of a jazz horn⁴ player's line demonstrates how swing and democratization are used. The syllables *djah*, *bah*, and *dah*, are used to show how the note should be played, while in *classical*⁵ music, the syllables of a horn player's notes used are *da* and *di*. Syllables of classical music give melody a very legato feel, one that is smooth and does not break during a phrase. On the other hand, the syllables of these notes in the trumpeter's line present a very full, percussive sound. In particular, the *djah* sound on the pickup eighth note into the measure gets much emphasis because of the naturally strong sound of "j". The "j" sound is reflected in the horn player's playing of the music. This weak-beat eighth note is brought up to the same emphasis as the eighth note played after by its accented *djah* sound, which is a perfect example of how democratization works within the rhythmic ideas of jazz. Furthermore, the third eighth note in the measure is to be played with the *dah* sound, which gives it the least emphasis of the notes in the line. This eighth note occurs on beat 2, the strongest beat in a measure. The other eighth notes, occurring on beats of medium strength, are played with a *bah* sound leaving them with a very

³ Schuller, *Early Jazz*, page 8

⁴ Jazz musicians commonly referred to all brass and wind instruments as a "horn." This is the definition in its context

⁵ Classical Music in this case is defined as European music representing non-jazz ideas. A few composers include Bach, Mozart, Liszt, Debussy, Beethoven, etc.

neutral tone. Therefore, the sounds of this short line have been articulated so that they all have equal emphasis in the line. Equal emphasis gives the notes a very steady flow from this measure to the next, which is how the term “swing” is characterized. We can conclude that these two terms are very prevalent in jazz and also have a very close relationship.

Traditional African Music

From where do these ideas of swing and democratization originate? The primary answer is from traditional African rhythm, but before analyzing African music, Gunther Schuller says it is important that we do not listen to African music with a European ear, because when listening with a European approach, false discoveries will be produced. Musicologist A.M. Jones did a very good job of analyzing African music by completing his book *‘Studies in African Music’* in 1956, which was the first book that successfully approached jazz music without this western or European ear. A.M. Jones’ biggest finding was that jazz music is completely contrapuntal and is conceived through polymetric and polyrhythmic relationships in time. The terms polyrhythm and polymeter refer to multiple time meters and multiple rhythms playing at once, opposed to monometer and monometric, common in all Western music. One other important finding of Jones’ was that African music is improvised, but only upon a very strict set of rules, which must be followed.

A wide variety of instruments were used in traditional African music, ranging from voice, to rattles and shakers, to xylophones, to stringed instruments. For the purpose of analysis, we will look at the instruments used in the following selection of music. These instruments consist of:

- *Gankogui*, a bell-like instrument that gives a simple background rhythm in the ensemble
- *Axate*, a rattle that plays beats similar to the *Gankogui*

- Claps, generally imitating the pulse of the music rather than playing complex rhythms
- A chorus or *Song*, meant to either be sung or chanted. This vocal part often involved participation of the audience
- Four part drum ensemble, playing tradition African instruments and consisting of *Sogo*, *Kidi*, *Atsimeou*, and *Kagan*

When looking at the actual tradition African piece, we can truly see how African rhythm is approached compared to Western rhythm. In A.M Jones' transcription of *Nyayito Dance*, an Ewe (Ghana) funeral dance, we can interpret how these instruments of the traditional African ensemble interact with each other.

*Nyayito Dance (Bars 38-39)*⁶

The musical score for *Nyayito Dance (Bars 38-39)* is presented in a multi-staff format. The staves are labeled on the left: GANK, AXAT, CLAPS, SONG, ATSI, SOGO, KIDI, and KAG. The score is divided into two measures, 38 and 39, indicated by bar lines and measure numbers. The SONG staff includes lyrics in Ewe: "ee - nu, Anyakoawo yi a-dza wu ge na a-kpa - lu - ee, ma-do a-loewo gbe ni mi doro." The ATSI staff includes lyrics: "- KID, GA - GA KID - KID GAA - GA KID - KID, GA KREBE - GI KI - DE, GA KREBE - GI KI." The SOGO staff includes lyrics: "- DID - GI, KRID KRI KI - DID - GI,". The KIDI staff includes lyrics: "KA - GAD KA - GAD". The KAG staff includes lyrics: "KA - GAD KA - GAD". A "REPEAT" section is marked above the ATSI staff. The score uses various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

⁶ Jones, *Studies in African Music*. Vol. 2, page 24

Analysis of 'Nyayito Dance'

The first 3 lines, consisting of *Gankogui*, *Axatse*, and claps are clearly marked in 12/8 time signature, and remain constant throughout the selection. Even though these three lines share a common time signature, their rhythms are placed separately enough to already give a feeling of polyrhythm in the ensemble. *Song* changes time signature almost every measure, starting in 3/4 in the first bar, switching to 3/8 in the second, 2/4 in the third to fifth, and the last bar in 3/8. *Atsimeou's* part begins with a carry-over from the previous page, with the last 2 beats of a 3/8 bar, two 2/4 bars, one bar of 3/8, then a final 5/4 bar. Continuing, *Sogo's* part consists of all 3/4 bars (set one eighth note off of the first three lines). *Kidi* consists of all 6/8 bars, set off from the first three lines and *Song*. Finally, *Kagan* is completely made up of entirely 3/8 measures, but also with notes that are set off in time from the other instruments. When looking at just the bottom five lines of the ensemble, in a total of 28 measures, vertical matchup between the polymetric lines occurs only 5 times.

These vertical matchups are as follows:

- Bar four of *Atsimeou* and bar three of *Sogo*,
- Bar three of *Atsimeou* and bar two of *Kidi*,
- Bar five in *Song*, and bar four of *Sogo*
- Bar four and five of *Atsimeou* and *Kagan*

In a selection that only lasts for a few seconds, it would be extremely hard for the Western musician to resist vertical lineup if improvising an ensemble with the rules of this rhythmic style.

Slave Music

It is important to look at the history behind this traditional music through its influence and development into early jazz music. The most important event in this process was the slave trade, as slaves were brought to the United States from Africa throughout the 1800s. Slaves kept their traditional musical ideas, but at the same time, had to make adjustments to the white man's music, or Western music, simply because they were in a new place. African rhythmic ideas, such as polymetric and

polyrhythmic structure, had to be fit into a European mono-metric, mono-rhythmic structure. Very commonly, slaves would sing working songs that used ideas of African rhythm, but were influenced by common music in the United States at the time. Franny Kemble, a nineteenth-century musician and actress addresses the perplexing qualities, but mentions the functional aspect of a slave work song on her trip to a Georgia plantation in 1839. In reference to her trips along the river, she says "Our boatmen... accompany the stroke of their oars with the sound of their voices. I have been quite at a loss to discover any familiar) foundation (of their songs) that I have heard lately, which have appeared to me extraordinarily 'wild and unaccountable'."⁷ In her writings, Kemble also praises the "admirable time and true accent" that the slaves delivered the call and response patterns of these songs with. Others attempted to analyze the rowing slave songs, but the difficulty in their rhythms lead to complications when writing them in conventional Western notation. The authors of *Slave Songs in the United States*, a detailed discussion about the nature of slave songs, explain in the introduction that with paper and types, the analysis of slave songs will "convey but a faint shadow of the original" because "the intonation and delicate variations of even one singer cannot be reproduced on paper."⁸ Charles P. Ware, one of the editors himself as well as a plantation owner, says that that he has notated two measures are sung to each stroke. The first measure sung is "accented by the beginning of the stroke", and the second "by the oars in the row-locks."⁹ Ware also states that the boatmen do from "sixteen to thirty strokes a minute, twenty-four on the average" This average of twenty-four strokes would indicate a tempo of about 132 beats per minute.

⁷ Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*, page 218

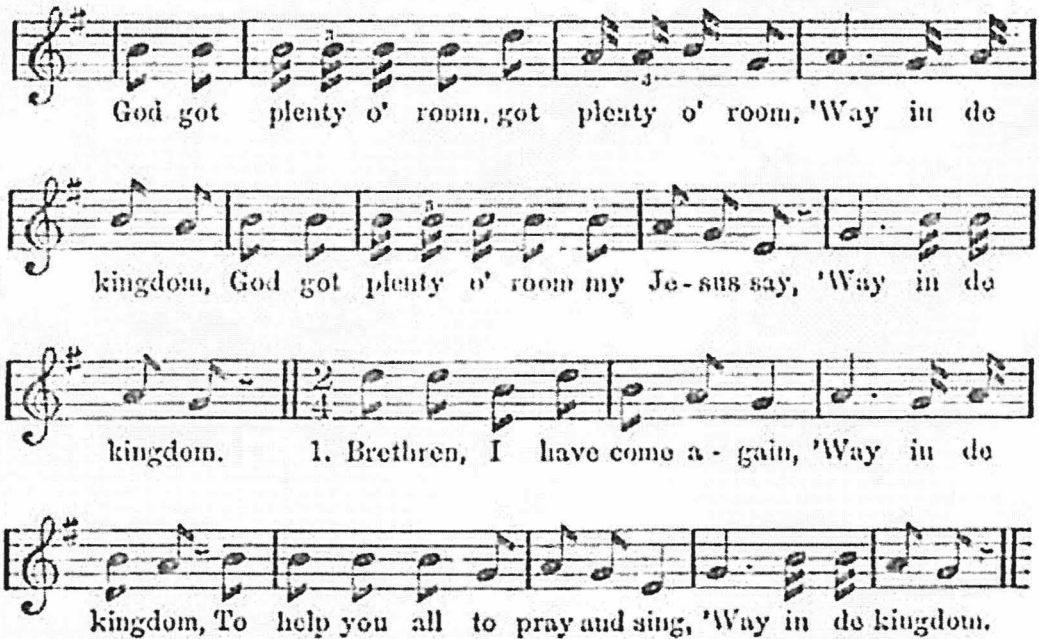
⁸ Ware, Allen, Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States*

⁹ Ware, *Slave Songs of the United States*

Analysis of 'God Got Plenty O' Room'

10

128. GOD GOT PLENTY O' ROOM.



God got plenty o' room, got plenty o' room, 'Way in de
kingdom, God got plenty o' room my Je-sus say, 'Way in de
kingdom. 1. Brethren, I have come a - gain, 'Way in de
kingdom, To help you all to pray and sing, 'Way in de kingdom.

Above is F.W. Allen's transcription of the slave song "God Got Plenty O' Room," meant to be sung while rowing. Allen explains that the transcription is "exactly as it was sung, some of the measures in 2/8, some in 3/8, and some in 2/4 time. The irregularity probably arises from the omission of rests, but it seemed a hopeless undertaking to restore to the correct time."¹¹ This piece can be seen as a middle ground between the complexity of African rhythm and jazz rhythm. Allen refers to a "correct time," indicating that he felt unfamiliar with the rhythm used in the song. However, the music is far closer to what we would consider rhythm of Western music. From the eleventh bar onwards, the piece remains in 2/4 time, providing an easy comprehension of the beat to Western listeners. Still, the rhythm and shape of the voice in this piece are strikingly similar to that of *song's* part in *Nyayito Dance*.

¹⁰ W.F. Allen, C.P. Ware, and L.M. Garrison, *Slave songs of the Unites States*, Page 106

¹¹ W.F. Allen, C.P. Ware, and L.M. Garrison, *Slave songs of the Unites States*, Page 107

Syncopation

Even though many adjustments had already been made from traditional African rhythm, slave music began to be further corrupted in America towards European ideas. Change in cultural thinking, and therefore music, influenced the Negro to convert both to Christianity and to more European musical concepts. Generally, these acculturations were caused by the charitable side of white men's cultural attitudes, while the oppressive side was an influence for slaves to keep their traditional forms of expression.

The best way for slaves to adapt to Western music while maintaining tradition in their own music was to begin to use western ideas in music, but to incorporate syncopation in rhythm. Syncopation is defined as "a shift of accent in a passage or composition that occurs when a normally weak beat is stressed."¹² In other words, syncopation is an unexpected rhythm that occurs offbeat from the backbeat of a musical piece.

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In Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag*, written for piano, syncopation can be clearly seen and analyzed. The left hand in the four-measure selection plays constant eighth notes that create a harmony, while the upper line plays a melody on partials of the beat that are set off of the left-hand eighth notes. In the upper line, emphasis is naturally put on the octave E flats, which occur three sixteenth notes apart from each other in each measure. Since each eighth note in the left hand by definition is 2 sixteenth notes away from the previous one, the two lines clash in timing or vertical line up at least once every measure. Western music generally used melodies and

¹² The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, *Syncopation*- The Online Free Dictionary

¹³ Joplin/Stark and Son, *Maple Leaf Rag*, page 1

harmonies that coincided with each other throughout the piece, rarely using rhythms that separated the two. Syncopation therefore was a way for Africans to impose their polyrhythmic ideas into a Western-based piece of music. However, Schuller explains that “a syncopation is a modification, an embellishment of a beat,”¹⁴ so it still is dependent upon the beat itself. It is important to remember that African music did not contain what Western listeners would call syncopation; it only occurs in very small rhythmic values. After syncopation was brought about as an idea, it gave Western listeners a better understanding, yet was still very unfamiliar and confusing.

Other Musical Developments

Evolution of this already assimilated African music and rhythms went on and were transformed into simpler rhythm in jazz, but were also blended with other musical ideas at that time. After the Emancipation and end of the Civil War, traditional African funeral processions were mixed with the traditions of German and Italian marching bands to create the idea of second line parades in New Orleans. Anglo-American hymns were mixed with African monadic and diodic singing and eventually became the blues. The minstrelsy gave the Negroes an area of popular entertainment, and with the popular musical forms from Europe at the time- polkas, jigs, marches, etc., blending of these forms of music with African rhythmic ideas gave birth to a piano based vertical and horizontal type of music- ragtime.

Analysis of ‘*The Chant*’

If the tradition African ensemble was compared to a typical ensemble of the early twentieth century, we can see the drastic differences of instrumentation, yet we can

¹⁴ Schuller, *Early Jazz*, page 15

still see a few similarities in how certain instruments in the African ensembles and American 20th century ensembles are similar to each other.

If we look at sections of an early jazz score, such as *The Chant*, recorded by Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers and composed by Mel Stitzel, we can analyze the similarities between the structure of the piece and the structure of traditional African music.

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The image shows a musical score for the piece "The Chant" by Mel Stitzel. The score is for a jazz ensemble and includes parts for Bb Clarinet, Bb Cornet (Bb Trumpet), Trombone, Piano, Banjo, Bass, and Drums. The tempo is marked as "♩ = 120 - 126". The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The time signature is common time (C). The first four measures show the Bb Clarinet and Bb Cornet playing a syncopated melody of eighth notes, while the other instruments provide a rhythmic accompaniment.

In this section, which is the first four measures of the piece, the first clear observance is the syncopation of the clarinet and cornet's melody. The instruments play eighth notes throughout, except for dropping the seventh eighth note of bar. This seventh note is one of the naturally strong notes in the bar, which already creates syncopation when dropped. In the second and third bars a rhythm is played where the notes occur on the first, fourth, sixth, and eighth eighth notes. The only strong beat in these measures in which a note is played is the beat of the first eighth note. The emphasis on weak beats four, six, and eight create such a syncopation, that

¹⁵ Stitzel/Warner Bros Music, *Essential Jazz Editions- The Chant*, page 1

it has the potential to be difficult for a Western listener to keep track of where the strongest beats (second and fourth quarter notes) lay in the measure. This melody perfectly demonstrates the transformation of African polyrhythmic ideas into a western styled piece of music.

16

The musical score for measures 16-19 of 'The Chant' features the following parts:

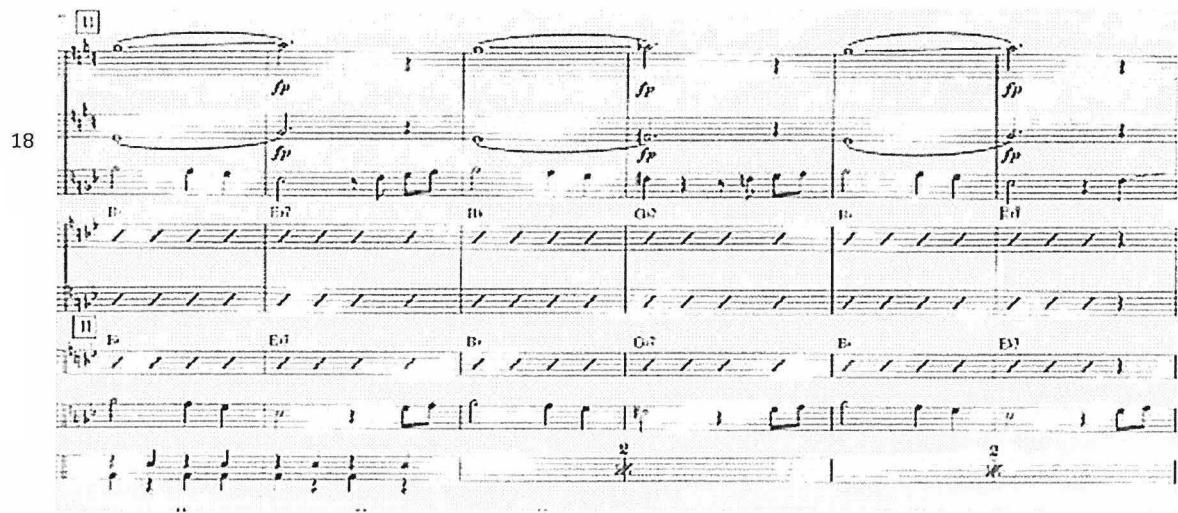
- Cl. (Clarinet):** Melodic line with a call-and-answer pattern between measures 16 and 17.
- Ct. (Cornet):** Melodic line that mirrors the Clarinet's call-and-answer pattern.
- Tbn. (Trombone):** Harmonic support with sustained notes.
- Pno. (Piano):** Rhythmic accompaniment with a pattern of a quarter note on beat 1 and an eighth note on the upbeat of beat 2.
- Bjo. (Banjo):** Rhythmic accompaniment with the same pattern as the Piano.
- Bass:** Harmonic support with sustained notes.
- Drums:** Simple rhythmic pattern.

In this selection of the score, we see a patterned section of call-and-answer melody between the clarinet and the cornet. This section gives us a chance to examine the instrumentation of the piece and find relations to the instrumentation of *Nyayito Dance*. The primary melody in the selection is in the clarinet's part, which moves up and down more than any other part. Clarinet maintains melody through the entire piece with just a few exceptions. In *Nyayito Dance*, melody is primarily conveyed through *song*. Both melodic parts play rhythms that are completely contrapuntal to the harmonic parts. In this selection, piano and banjo are both indicated to repeat a previous rhythm, which was a rhythm of a quarter note on beat one, and an eighth note on the upbeat of beat 2 (fourth eighth note) tied to one more quarter note. Banjo and piano repeat these rhythms in the entire selection, and their

¹⁶ Stitzel/Warner Bros Music, *Essential Jazz Editions- The Chant*, page 3

parts indicate the chord to be played rather than certain notes. This notation of music was very common for an instrument in the rhythm section, so the listener knows that both of these instruments are providing a fundamental rhythm that the other parts are based off of. When looking back at *Nyayito Dance*, we see that the first two lines (third line is discussed later) coincide with each other, providing a similar fundamental rhythm for the listener. These lines are the only lines containing constant vertical matchup. When taking accommodation to Western music into account, we can see the evolution of the *Gankogui* and *Axatse* parts into the rhythm section in this piece. Both groups of instruments play the most similar parts out of the entire ensemble. The drums line of this selection coincides very much with banjo and piano, but plays a rhythm that lies even more on the strong beats. In the first measure, the drums play on beats 1 and 3, then on beat one and the upbeat of beat 2 in the second. Parallels can be drawn between the simplicity of the drum's part in this selection and the claps part in *Nyayito Dance*. Both parts play the most basic rhythms of the ensemble, creating a rhythm that lays down the tempo and backbeat. This rhythm generally consists of quarter notes, which naturally lack syncopation. At the same time, the drums in *The Chant* are clearly the most percussive instrument and the claps are the most percussive in *Nyayito Dance*.¹⁷

¹⁷ Clearly, most of the instruments present in *Nyayito Dance*, but relative to the ensemble, claps are more percussive and produce less tone than any other instrument



One other section to consider in relations to African music is the four-measure section above. Clarinet and Cornet both play a part in this section that slides up from a G to an A, imitating a sound affect rather than a melody. This type of sound was the typical sound that caused many critics to look down upon jazz music when first created. However, this type of sound relates back to traditional African music because it uses a sound that was meant to stand out from the other instruments. Perhaps, this idea of standing out was taken from the African idea of contrapuntal parts that each represent an idea and turned into an idea melodic terms. The other relation we can draw from this section is the parts of trombone and bass. These parts play a fairly simple rhythm, strengthening the backbeat, but they help move the piece from one chord to another, playing passing notes. Similarly, *Astimeou* and *Kidi* lay down rhythms in *Nyiyato Dance* that have different tones, but still provide rhythmic ideas for the ensemble rather than playing a melody.

Conclusion

After examining multiple fragments of scores from different time periods in the evolution of African rhythm to early Jazz and exploring some of the historical context of the process, clear distinctions can be drawn. Firstly the, terms “swing” and “ democratization” and their use in music were a complete necessity in order for jazz music to retain its identity of African rhythmic heritage. At the same time, these

¹⁸ Stitzel/Warner Bros Music, *Essential Jazz Editions- The Chant*, page 2

ideas were needed to transition African ideas into a format that could be understood and appreciated by a Western audience. Secondly, the instruments used in jazz ensembles were played in a completely different way than they had been played in Europe for the past 3 centuries. The reason for this was that when only European instruments were available to slaves, they would naturally play the instruments in an attempt to mimic their traditional African instruments and the roles that each instrument played. Thirdly, acceptance of Western ideas and acculturation by slaves after having lived in America made it possible for the transformation to take place. When taking another look at Joachim Berendt's definition of jazz, it provides a very simple summary of the entire history of the transformation. But most importantly, the consideration that African music is still unfamiliar to the Western ear has to be remembered and taken with seriousness. Until western listeners and analysts of African music are accustomed to the polyrhythms and polymetric time of African music, completely accurate studies cannot be made. Perhaps, the only way for this process to take place is to develop a greater appreciation of African rhythm and assimilate some of its direct ideas into our Western concept of music. By direct, I mean the ideas of polyrhythm and polymeter as they originally were, not the ideas of rhythm that have been adjusted to fit Western music. When we are able to do this and when people are initially taught music with both a Western and African approach, we will be able to further our understanding of the African influence on the famous jazz music that was known as "America's popular music"¹⁹ for a great deal of time.

¹⁹ Bill Kirchner, *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*, Oxford University Press, 2005, Chapter Two.

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